



RESEARCH PAPER

The Varicose Ulcer of 1984: Interpellated Auto-culpablization in Orwell

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: March 13, 2022</p> <p>Accepted: June 27, 2022</p> <p>Online: June 30, 2022</p> <p>Keywords: Auto-culpablization, Big Brother, Interpellation, ISAs, RSAs, Totalitarianism</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: muhammadjawad .cheema@ogr.yeni yuziyil.edu.tr</p>	<p>This paper analyzes the ways and tools through which Orwell's characters are subjected to interpellated auto-culpabilization in his celebrated novel <i>1984</i>. Interpellation is a process through which people internalise certain ethical, cultural and political norms. Through interpellation, groups/hegemonic regimes inculcate their beliefs into the minds of people via discursive and coercive practices. For Althusser (1971 & 2014), ideology functions as a recruiting agent to recruit subjects who are unconsciously already interpellated. Ideology serves as a booster shot to enable different individuals to adhere to the call of ruling elite through ISAs and RSAs. This paper argues that interpellation always leads to auto-culpablization. Kundera (1988) uses the term auto-culpablization to define characters trapped in totalitarian setups and are made to feel guilty for the wrong-doings done by the regime itself. This study highlights all those tools of interpellation used by Big Brother to promote his socio-political agenda in Orwell's <i>1984</i>.</p>

Introduction

That Orwell's *1984* is a prophetic novel like no other is an understatement. Had Orwell (2003) given his novel the title 1994, for Bloom (2007), it would not have mattered (p. 3). For Sartre (1988), a writer must not concern himself with the dead or the unborn as he/she essentially writes for 'the age.' "A book has its absolute truth within the age. It is lived like an outbreak, like a famine" (242). Contrary to Sartre's (1988) idea of a writer, visionaries like Orwell occupy a different place in the annals of literary history for their remarkable foresight. Some works refuse to be irrelevant, and therein lies their power. Orwell's *1984* is the ultimate dystopian gospel, a sci-fi book of revelations where a Job like Big Brother rules an unrecognizable London. Orwell's futuristic fantasy is today's reality.

This paper discusses the ways in which the villainous Big Brother of Orwerll's *1984* subjects his people to a hellish panopticon of interpellation and auto-culpablization. Interpellation and auto-culpablization cannot function without the other; hence, the first stage to hegemonize a group is interpellation, followed by auto-culpablization. Through interpellation, certain ideas are incepted into the minds of people, which gradually begin to take shape into certain behavioural patterns desired by the regime. The interpellated individual sees the regime as an eptime of good and whatever bad exists is the individual's doing. Thus any hegemonic group uses ISAs to drive home its ideology successfully.

Literature Review

The recent past has seen a rise in the distribution of dystopian, postapocalyptic, and posthuman literature. Since time immemorial, Apocalypse has embedded itself into the human psyche as an inevitable event. Orwell had worthy predecessors in the likes of H. G. Wells, Franz Kafka and Aldous Huxley, who shaped much of the twentieth-century literature. Their surreal works with political subtexts have generated a plethora of interpretations. Huxley, who taught French to Orwell, admired 1984's presentation of the same kind of society shown by him in *Brave New World*. In recent times, McCarthy, Saramago, Atwood etc, have furthered the tradition of postapocalyptic writing and unsurprisingly, the works of the past and today have the same vision of the future—a hegemonic society ruled by sadistic oligarchs.

Material and Methods

The paper descriptively and comparatively analyzed Orwell's 1984 by invoking Althusser's ideas on interpellation and Kundera's study of Kafka's world. The paper created a hybrid framework based on Althusser's model and Kundera's description of auto-culplabilization to study Orwell's seminal novel and created a comprehensive model to undertake the analysis. As stated earlier, interpellation and auto-culplabilization share a causal link and the data was selected accordingly. Orwell's novel presented itself as a fitting specimen to test the hybrid model developed in the paper. The study proceeded from establishing the tools used by the Big Brother to interpellate his people to a psychological insight into the characters; autoculplabilization in the novel.

Results and Discussion

Orwell's 1984 gyrates around the common theme of individual vs system, but unlike its thematic predecessors, it presents a highly organized and resourceful system headed by someone known as Big Brother. The system comprises ministries of Truth, Peace, Plenty and Love. Big Brother's panopticon gaze watches everyone through the telescreens. Orwell derived the idea of Big Brother and Telescreen from his own personal experience of being watched by the Scotland Yard Police for being a member of local Communist Party (Sheldon, 2020, p. 84). Thoughts are being monitored by the Thought Police. History is being reshaped to tell narratives suitable to Big Brother's cause by the Ministry of Truth. In the same vein, war is propagated by the Ministry of Peace, starvation by the Ministry of Plenty and hatred by the Ministry of Love. Through ideological and repressive tools, these ministries help Big Brother curb the freedom of people and maintain his stranglehold.

Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, suffers from a varicose ulcer. It 'itches' and 'inflames' unbearably at times. Over the course of the novel, the mention of the varicose ulcer acquires symbolic significance. The ulcer symbolizes Winston's mental state, which sometimes 'throbs,' 'itches,' and 'inflames'. Winston, a low rank cog in Big Brother's machine, has had enough of revolution. Big Brother's surveillance system, Thought Police, re-writing history, and anti-love policies have left him hopeless regarding humanity's future. Like Christopher Nolan's sci-fi movie *Inception* (2010), anti-Big Brother idea has taken possession of his consciousness just like a metaphorical varicose ulcer with roots shooting through his whole body. Once an idea is planted inside the mind, it cannot be shaken off. Even though scared of Big Brother, Winston cannot shrug off such thoughts. He unconsciously writes "down with the big brother" (p. 990) in his contraband diary.

This paper maintains that the working of Big Brother's regime in 1984 is an excellent representation of Althusser's (1971 & 2014) idea of 'interpellation' where state ideology governs the lives of people. Moreover, the psychological downside of interpellation, according to Milan Kundera (1988), always engenders a sense of guilt in

people, which he calls auto-culpabilization. The system interpellates individuals in such a way that anything deviating from an accepted 'ideological' behaviour, first and foremost, arouses a sense of self-accusation. This paper analyses Orwell's *1984* by linking the two concepts to explain the novel's dystopian world.

The above-mentioned ministries do what Althusser (2014) calls interpellation. Interpellation is a ruthless process in which the powerful ruling elite brainwashes, exploits and distorts the identities of the individuals/groups subjugated through state ideology and apparatuses. In Marxist theory, socio-politically motivated discourses embedded in institutions, which constitute individual identities, fall in the domain of interpellation. For Althusser (2014), ideology:

...acts or functions in such a way to 'recruit' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or 'transforms' individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call interpellation or hailing. It can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace, everyday hailing by (or not by) the police: 'Hey, you there!'... [T]here are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out, 'Hey, you there!' An individual (nine times out of ten, it is the one who is meant) turns around, believing-suspecting-knowing that he's the one - recognizing, in other words, that he 'really is the person' the interpellation is aimed at. In reality, however, things happen without succession (Althusser, 2014, pp. 190-191).

The relevance of the call posits an individual to acknowledge the authority of law and its ideology. Invariably, we all submit to the call of ideology one way or the other. The example quoted above highlights the inevitable power of ideology. It cannot be ignored.

Interpellation is closely related to auto-culpabilization. Milan Kundera, the Czech born French novelist, uses it to define the world of Kafka. The term could synonymously be used as auto-accusation, self-accusation and self-incrimination. The term auto-culpabilization defines the true essence of Kafka's characters who often end up being caught in a bureaucratic labyrinth particularly in *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Auto-culpabilization means that an individual is made to feel guilty by the ideological state apparatuses or repressive state apparatuses. Individuals or a certain group is made to believe that the system is error free. The policemen who arrest Joseph K. in *The Trial* confidently inform him that their department never makes mistakes. This process has such a coercive and ruthless effect on the psychology of an individual that he starts to internalize it. Such feelings not only arise from within oneself but also from others' opinion and judgements. The characters of Kafka and Kundera are particularly interpellated by different means such as state agencies, bureaucracy, law agents, military intelligence and socio-political forces.

Kundera (1988) cites a classic example of interpellated auto-culpabilization in his essay "Kafka's World." An engineer from Prague leaves the country to attend an academic conference in London. After a few days, he learns upon his arrival that he has been declared an enemy of the state. His defection is openly published in a government-controlled newspaper in the following words, "A Czech engineer attending a conference in London has made a slanderous statement about his socialist homeland do the Western press and has decided to stay in the West" (p. 88). The engineer informs the editor of the newspaper to retract the news, but he is told to go to the ministry of interior for said purpose as the news was received from the ministry. The engineer meets the minister, who categorically refuses to retract the news because "they never retract" (p. 89). However, the minister tells the engineer not to be apprehensive as the report received from the intelligence agencies must have been a mistake since the engineer stands in person before the minister. The assurance

does not console the engineer. He becomes an insomniac. He becomes paranoid upon realizing that his phone is being tapped, the family follows and his house being watched over by secret agents. He eventually leaves the country illegally when his paranoia reaches an extreme level. Thus, the system arranges the events in such a way that their “mistake” becomes a reality using state tools. Such is the world inhabited by the characters of Kafka, Orwell and Kundera.

For Kundera (1988), totalitarian regimes are further characterized by, firstly, a labyrinthine structure without an exit in which an individual is trapped; secondly, private is public and the public is private. Kundera (1988) calls the invasion of policemen in Josph K’s apartment “rape of privacy” (p. 96). There is no space for individuality in such totalitarian regimes. Everyone is part of the regime’s machinery. People are not allowed to have private lives. Even love, a highly personal matter, is a public matter.

RSAs act on the behest of those in power to implement a certain ideology through force and suppression. To achieve their goal all coercive means are utilized. Unlike Repressive State Apparatuses, Ideological State Apparatuses fall into the private domain. It includes churches, educational institutions, families, and cultural practices. Without using coercive methods, Ideological State Apparatuses affirm the power of the hegemonic regime through discourse. ISAs are an invisible form of interpellation. According to Althusser (1971), the best form of interpellation is always invisible, and that is done through ISAs by using the tool of language, the language of the powerful or the one at the helm of affairs. Language becomes powerful because of the power behind the language, says Althusser. Althusser further says that ideological interpellation is a fixed phenomenon; once you are interpellated, there is no need for renewal. Althusser defines a state as a repressive machine used by the “ruling class” as a tool to suppress, oppress or dominate the proletariat class.

Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, is interpellated through ISAs and RSAs. As discussed earlier, the metaphorical varicose ulcer ailing him enables him to see through Big Brother’s mechanized totalitarian regime’s lies. Throughout the novel, Winston dreams of his mother, childhood shelter days, and constant fear of being bombarded by the enemy. Winston somehow still hangs onto his human disposition, which other inner and outer party members have lost. It enables him to admire Proles-the outcasts, who neither belong to the inner party nor the out party. They have been left on their own based on their primitiveness, ignorant behaviour and lack of interest in politics. The recurrence of dreams is symbolic of Winston’s humanity and his bond with the past. He acknowledges that the Party, “[lifts] [people] clean out of the stream of history” (p. 1108). By lifting people out of the past, a present is posited for them, which in turn enables the Party to control their future. Winston laments the brutality of the Party which has divested people of their humanity:

The terrible thing that the Party had done was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feelings, were of no account, while at the same time robbing you of all power over the material world. When once you were in the grip of the Party, what you felt or did not feel, what you did or refrained from doing, made literally no difference... The proles had stayed human. They had not become hardened inside. They had held on to the primitive emotions which he himself had to re-learn by conscious effort (p. 1108-09).

The Party succeeds in stripping its members of their humanity by employing ISAs and RSAs. The novel opens with a description of how Big Brother watches everyone through the telescreen, “he could be seen as well as heard” (p. 976). The Telescreen picks up every tiny sound, records it and later the agents at the Ministry scrutinize the material. Under such circumstances, freedom, the very essence of what it means to be human, erodes slowly but surely.

There is no room for questions in the Party. Asking or harbouring questions borders on sedition and betrayal. The Party has established a whole department known as Thought Police to monitor the thoughts of people. Anyone 'thinking' anything against the party is considered a traitor. Winston commits the crime of asking questions as O'Brien remarks that Winston could not understand the motives of the society he lived in. He refers to what Winston wrote in his secret diary "Do you remember writing in your diary, "I understand HOW: I do not understand WHY"? It was when you thought about "why" that you doubted your own sanity" (p. 1187). In short, 'why' lands Winston in trouble because it violates the fundamental principles of the society built by Big Brother. Interpellated subjects are supposed to behave like 'subjects.' The only freedom they have is to make two and two four or five if the Party should wish so.

The Party has abolished the concepts of individualism, family and recreation. When an individual indulges in solitude, or nostalgia or takes a walk, he is considered taking part in communal joy. Such an individual draws the wrath of the Party as the time spent in recreation could have been spent on working for the benefit of the regime. As Kundera (1988) remarks, public is private and private is public, the traditional institution of family has disappeared. Now, the Party is the only family people are supposed to have. Mr. Parsons who commits thoughtcrime, was denounced by his daughter who informed on him to the Thought Police. The Party uses children as their spies to keep an eye on parents. The Party's RSAs have penetrated the most sacred of human institutions-family.

According to Althusser (2014) the best form of interpellation is always invisible, and that is done through ISA'S by using the tool of language, the language of the powerful or the one who is at the helm of affairs. Althusser (2014) further says that ideological interpellation is a fixed phenomenon; once you are interpellated there is no need of renewal. "ideology has always already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: individuals are always-already subjects" (p. 265). Since individuals are always already interpellated like Oedipus, or a newborn baby with the seeds of Original Sin, all it takes to interpellate an individual is an invisible narrative.

The Party has mastered the art of demolishing old narratives by replacing them with modern grand-narratives. "The older generation had mostly been wiped out in the great purges of the fifties and sixties, and the few who survived had long ago been terrified into complete intellectual surrender" (p. 1043). The party succeeded in erasing the past and, now, even 'the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth" (p. 1033). Winston, a prosaic heart in a prose world, has lasting ties with the past. His dreams, diary, paperweight etc. are a connection with the past lost to the present generation forever. He often visits the Proles' area because it reminds him of what the world has lost. The success of the Party at erasing the past could be gauged from the fact that even those who survived the purge cannot recollect anything meaningful from their past.

The Party's invisible ideological state apparatuses work under the Ministry of Truth-a "labyrinthine ministry," (p. 1093) reminiscent of the labyrinthine structure of bureaucracy experience by the Prague Engineer. The Ministry's is the mastermind behind 'doublethink.' Paradoxically, Winston works at the Ministry of Truth which spreads lies. Winston wipes off, adds or redacts historical facts from archives at Big Brother's behest. Individuals' existence is dependent on files. The situation is uncannily similar to Kundera's (1988) remarks about Kafka's characters, "they are the shadows of a mistake in the file, shadows without even the right to exist as shadows" (pp. 90-91). The Ministry of Truth spreads further lies to people about improving literacy rate under the regime, better housing conditions, more food than the past, the prolonged average life of people, and what

not. Since he supervises alteration of official history, Winston knows in his heart that, "Not a word of it could ever be proved or disproved" (p. 1032).

The ministry is developing a new language specifically to control people. With that new language it would be impossible even to use any seditious words against the regime. Winston is particularly interested in studying the Newspeak dictionary developed by his co-worker Syme. When the regime catches him at the end, Winston's prosecutor, O'Brien quotes Winston's desire to study the dictionary as one of his crimes against the Party. The language of the revolution and rebellion would be put to rest forever. Words like freedom wouldn't exist in the new dictionary. By employing the idea of doublethink, the Party can mould its narrative effectively for its benefits at any given time. For instance, at the Hate Week, originally designed to discourage common empathy, love and procreation, the speaker suddenly changes his allegiance to Euroasia and declare Eastasia. People, since they have been interpellated to believe whatever the Party believes, shift their allegiance as well without hesitation.

Big Brother fears empathy and romantic relationship. For him they pose a threat to his regime. The Ministry of Love, whose real job is to spread hatred and induce torture, forbids sexual intercourse or any romantic adventure for that matter. The frustration and anger produced in the wake of such restrictions were used to the advantage of the regime:

What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader worship. If you're happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother, the Three-Year Plans, the Two Minutes Hate, and all the rest of their bloody rot? That was very true, he thought. There was a direct intimate connexion between chastity and political orthodoxy. For how could the fear, the hatred, and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch, except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force? The sex impulse was dangerous to the Party, and the Party had turned it to account (pp. 1080-1081).

Such a systematic dismantling of anything human is finally achieved through auto-culpablization. Whenever Winston and Julia engage in sexual intercourse, Winston inevitably ends up thinking about Thought Police coupled with his fear of rats. The leitmotif of rats is an unconscious reminder of guilt. Winston considers himself a rat because the regime has interpellated his unconscious. The height of auto-culpablization is seen when Mr. Parsons and Winston exchange words in prison. When asked by Winston whether he is guilty or not, Parsons, who commits a thoughtcrime, replies, "'Of course I'm guilty!' cried Parsons with a servile glance at the telescreen. '*You don't think the Party would arrest an innocent man, do you?*' [emphasis mine]... 'Thoughtcrime is a dreadful thing, old man,' he said sententiously. 'It's insidious. It can get hold of you without your even knowing it. Do you know how it got hold of me? In my sleep! Yes, that's a fact'" (p. 1164). Parson's almost Biblical belief that the Party could never arrest an innocent man reminds the reader of the shock Joseph K. experiences when woken up by two police officers. The policemen tell Joseph K. that the philosophy of the department centres around finding 'guilt' instead of a guilty person. More importantly, their department never makes mistakes. Parsons accepts his 'guilt,' though he may not be guilty. Parsons even feels proud that his daughter denounced him to the regime. The level of interpellation and auto-culpablization has reached such an extreme that he prides himself on raising his children, "It shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway." (p. 1164). This highlights the success of the internalisation of the Party's ideology. Interpellation done by the regime has successfully fulfilled its 'function' of 'recruiting' individuals and turning them into 'subjects.'

Interpellation is not a permanent and perpetual process; it is subject to change with the passage of the time since all ideologies are time bound. Žižek (2012) in *Mapping*

Ideology (2012) discusses the fragility of interpellation, and also talks about why ideologies become out-dated with the passage of the time. For Žižek (2012), Althusser's ideological interpellation, though internalizes itself into ideological experience, yet, is never fully materialized and some residue is left over which he calls "...a stain of traumatic irrationality and senseless sticking to it" (p. 322).

Hence, the people at the helm of affair consistently remain active to make people reminiscent about the duty they owe to the state and authorities of the state. That is why people like Winston with "serious delusions" (Orwell, 2003, p. 1175) must be punished to reassert the totalitarian ideology. The best way to get rid of such people is to make them disappear from the archives, "Posterity will never hear of you...We shall turn you into gas and pour you into the stratosphere. Nothing will remain of you, not a name in a register, not a memory in a living brain" (p. 1181). Once historical archives have been altered, Winston's name shall forever be lost as if he never existed on the face of the earth. The cunning regime invents its own antagonist in the shape of O'Brien to lure rebels to exterminate them. Like Kundera's (1988) *Prague Engineer*, there is no escape from the labyrinth of totalitarian regimes.

Conclusion

1984's varicose ulcer since then has grown into a cancer. Its choking roots have wrapped themselves around the vital organs. Orwell's dystopia is no more confined to pages. Little did Orwell know that all regimes are totalitarian-capitalist, communist or democratic. Conquest (2007) rightly remarks, "Orwell in fact seems to have wanted socialism on condition that it would not be run by socialists" (p. 126). Whereas the postapocalyptic works such as McCarthy's *The Road* and Saramago's *Blindness* and *Death at Interval*, present hope, in the end, Orwell's novel shows no light at the end of the tunnel. In the era of whistleblowers like Snowden, Julian Assange etc. Orwell's worst nightmare has become a reality. There are Big Brothers everywhere in all sorts of parties. Orwell's futuristic horror movie will, it seems, forever be on a repeat telecast.

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